what they went through by BlueWall (MsMrs)

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Summary:

Will knew it would happen eventually. Mike's parents might have been ignorant, but they weren't dumb. And now, way earlier than anyone would have wanted, the Byers/Hopper-family has to deal with the fallout of a revelation.

1. Chapter 1

Notes for the Chapter:

> Master of procrastination? Nah, not me!
> Anyways, this is the first multi chapter fic in this series, and in case you don't get that from the story alone, it's set before all the sex stuff, just a few months after 'when they said it'

Will absently inspected his wrinkly fingers. He had already spent too much time in the bathtub. But it wasn‘t his fault, not at all. He just liked it warm ever since his terrible one-year ordeal. This had been as true in late 1984, when the Mind Flayer finally let go of his body, as it was in the spring of 1986.

Only, this bathtub wasn‘t the same as the one Will was used to. No, this was way larger, just like the room around it. Way cleaner too, and not plastered in these hideous tiles from the fifties that were yellowed and lined with black streaks Will‘s mom never could get rid of. This was a new house, with new tiles, a new bathtub, new everything. A new life for Will Byers, and it couldn‘t have felt better. Just the knowledge that his family was downstairs, all of them minus Jonathan, meant more comfort than any hot water could ever bring him.

Will smiled into the silence. He finally had it all in order, relatively speaking. Sure, he was scared at night, waking up in cold sweat more often than not. He enjoyed heat way too much for his own good, going as far as burning his tongue with boiling hot tea or coffee in the winter to get rid of the cold. But his family was there. A family who knew about every important aspect of his life and supported him. Mike was there and they had a place where they could be themselves without being judged. Hopper, El and Will‘s mom made sure of that. Everything was fine.

Only, it wasn‘t. Will was just preparing to finally get out of the tub, after the better part of an hour, when a knock on the door made him sink into the water again, just out of reflex. With all the bubbles gone, there was nothing to conceal his nudity - but the door was locked anyways. „Will, are you still in there?“ That was El‘s voice coming through the white, wooden door.

„Uh, yeah.“ Will shouted back. „I was just getting out.“

„Good. Mike‘s here, you should come downstairs.“

Will didn‘t like the serious tone El‘s voice was tinged in. She didn‘t sound glad in the least, which was odd because she loved having Mike over. Her worry was so apparent, it had Will‘s heart in his throat immediately. „Something wrong?“ he rasped out, finally bringing himself to stand up and carefully step out of the tub as not to wet the floor too much.

„It‘s...“ El started, sighing. „Just come downstairs please. We‘ll be waiting for you, okay?“

„O-okay...“ Her failing to explain and just leaving the hall like that did nothing to soothe the feeling that something was terribly, terribly wrong with Mike. Will hurried to get dried off, scrubbing his hair with a towel, then his entire body until his skin turned pink and tender to the touch. With the towel wrapped around him, he practically ran over to his room to find clothes.

Will ended up in his pajamas with the shirt on inside out, but he couldn‘t have cared less. He needed to get downstairs as fast as possible. The staircase flew by in a blur. The kitchen was empty. So was the dining room, but the doorway to the living room was occupied by a large shape; that of Hopper, who appeared to be scratching his beard with one hand, while the other one was stemmed against the wall for leverage. His broad shoulders blocked the entire doorframe, with only El visible, looking entirely lost with her fists clenched and bottom lip tugged under her teeth. Will‘s stepfather quickly made way when he heard him approaching.

The couch came into view that way, and while Will didn‘t know what he had expected, this was just a terrible sight to behold. Mike, on the couch, trembling all over as if he‘d just braved a Siberian blizzard, only held upright in a tight embrace by Will‘s mom, who appeared to be whispering words to him no one else could hear. Mike‘s face was partially hidden, but the pile of Kleenex on the living room table gave more away than Will wanted to see. A few of the paper towels were blood-stained.

On wobbly legs Will entered the room. „Mike?“ he breathed carefully.

It was clear that Mike was more than a bit shaken up. The rest of the family had left the two of them alone for now, because apparently Will‘s boyfriend hadn‘t spoken a word the entire ten minutes after he had stumbled into the house, tears mixing with the small trickle of blood from his nose.

It never once occurred to Will to actually ask what was going on, though. This was secondary. Will just held him for minutes on end as he proceeded to shiver and tremble like a leaf in the wind. His skin was so cold, his face left wet stains on Will‘s shoulder. Luckily, Joyce had managed to get the blood off of Mike‘s face.

„Will?“ Mike‘s voice came out almost inaudible.

„Yeah?“

„It was an accident. I w-was just so a-angry!“

„What happened?“ Will whispered.

„Not my fault!“ Mike wept. „I just... just... he wouldn‘t stop talking, a-and I didn‘t want to l-listen to that but he wouldn‘t let me leave a-and I had to get away, I-“

„Mike...“ Will gently shook his boyfriend by his shoulders to stop the near-panicked rambling. „From the beginning, okay? But only if you want to.“

It took a while for Mike to nod, a time spent mostly breathing, sniffing, and clutching tighter into Will‘s thin shirt. „Dinner.“ he choked up. „D-dad asked why I don‘t have a girlfriend again. J-just... this time I...“

Cold dread crept up Will‘s spine at those words. He believed to know what was coming next, as Mike went on. „You know I just ignore it, b-but he didn‘t s-stop, and he told me I sh-shouldn‘t spend so much time with you... and I got so angry, and I j-just t-t-told them! I told them, Will!“

It wasn‘t supposed to go this way. Of course Will and Mike had talked about Mike‘s parents, how they were going to react to this knowledge. Not like Joyce, or Jonathan, or Hopper, or El, that much was sure. But if Ted Wheeler did this to Mike, this must have gone even worse than they had feared during those long nights when they were contemplating, hearts in their throats but with the knowledge that they were safe with Will‘s family.

„Your dad did this?“ Will breathed out, his thumb circling in the small of Mike‘s back.

„I-I kinda... kinda punched him too!“ Mike sobbed. „Just because he wouldn‘t let go of me! A-and then he said-“ But that was when Mike finally broke down entirely. What little composure he had left was lost the moment he weakly cried out „Boarding school!“

Will felt his entire body deflating at that exact moment. No! He wouldn‘t allow this. He‘d hide Mike. He‘d run away with him if necessary, because Will was absolutely convinced neither of them would survive this. „What about your mom? She wouldn‘t let this happen!“

„Didn‘t say a thing!“ It was clear that this fact disturbed Mike more than anything else that had happened tonight. „She just... looked so

disgusted! Will, what am I gonna do? They‘re gonna send me away! I had to get out! I just had to!“ It was as if Mike was trying to justify his entirely natural reaction to what happened. So what if he had punched his father once? Ted Wheeler didn‘t deserve better. So what if he had ran away from a home that obviously didn‘t want him anymore? Just a few months ago, in the days leading up to Christmas, Will‘s mom had promised Mike she‘d help him, and she wasn‘t going to break her word.

„They‘re not gonna send you away.“ Will said sternly, but wavering because he can‘t quite believe his own words. „We‘re not gonna let them, I promise.“

„That‘s right. We‘ll find a way out of this.“ The blush on Joyce Byers‘ cheeks was apparent when she stepped back into the living room, clearly having listened to everything without Will and Mike knowing. Her apology went unspoken, but Will felt it was unnecessary anyways. They would have told her everything spoken in this room, because there was just no way they were going to figure this situation out on their own, without the help of an adult.

And, speaking of adults, Hopper then reappeared too, followed by El, who looked enraged in an almost frightening manner. Will knew what she could do, and to some degree even feared she might do something stupid. Like, walk over to Mike‘s house and snap his father‘s neck. But El was also the first one to reach the couch again, to snake her arms around both boys, providing extra safety. God knows Will needed that.

Mike did too, judging from the way he writhed in their combined embrace without even coming close to calming his hoarse sobs.

„Your old man did that to you?“ Hopper grunted through gritted teeth, face reddened with anger.

„Y-yeah...“ Mike whispered hesitantly, while Will didn‘t need further words to understand where his stepfather was going. „B-but-“

„There‘s no ‚but‘, kid. I could have him at the station, in a cell, before midnight.“ Hopper looked about ready to grab his uniform and equipment and head out. „Goddamn nosebleed he gave you, that‘s not a small thing!“

„Hop, that‘s not a good idea.“ Will‘s mom cut in quickly.

„It‘s the only one we have.“ Hopper disagreed, his tone coming out harsher than he had probably aimed for. „If this goes in front of a judge, Ted won‘t have anything to decide anymore. And we both know that‘s not a decision Karen would make, no matter what.“

„And we won‘t have anything to hide anymore.“ Joyce went on. „Think about it, Hop! He‘ll spill on everything he found out tonight. Everyone‘s gonna know! The whole town!“

Hopper slumped a bit into himself hearing those words. „I punched him first.“ Mike piped up weakly.

„Doesn‘t make a difference.“ Hopper muttered. „No difference at all. But you‘re right, Joyce. Dammit. You‘re always right. Then what do we do?“

„Nothing.“ Will‘s mom said with a certain sense of finality. „Karen and Ted probably know where Mike is, but he‘s been here for half an hour, so I guess it‘s safe to say they‘re not coming for him tonight. If we‘re lucky we‘ll have the entire weekend to think.“

Hopper grumbled something to himself, obviously not satisfied with just sitting around and waiting, but settled down in his armchair eventually.

Joyce turned to the kids on the couch, and Will‘s heart grew two sizes at the sight of her endless compassion. „I‘ll fix you something to eat while you get ready for bed, okay?“

While there never really was any doubt that Mike was staying the night, and possibly even longer, Will still felt relieved hearing that. That was nothing compared to Mike, though, who let out just another pained sob.

Will felt so exhausted he could barely stand up straight. He was frightened out of his mind, hurt, angry. Yet, he still chuckled weakly when Mike emerged from his room in one of Will‘s spare pajama pants that ended a good three inches above his ankles.

„Tried your shirt.“ Mike mumbled, fumbling with his own shirt that he had apparently decided to wear. „Couldn‘t really get it on.“

Will sniffed once, smiling meekly. „You don‘t stink, if that‘s what you‘re thinking. Wanna go eat? Mom is making grilled cheese. Or... El‘s showing her how to make it properly.“

For the first time tonight, Mike actually raised his head and looked Will in the eyes. He even showed something like a smile. „I could use something to eat.“

Mike turned to walk past Will down the stairs. „Hey, Mike...“ Will stopped him.

„Yeah?“

„Don‘t you think you forgot something?“ Will couldn‘t help the teasing undertone, and while Mike‘s eyes welled up with sparkling tears once again, his small smile extended just slightly. Will had always loved how he had to stand on his tiptoes to kiss Mike, even to a point where he hoped he wouldn‘t end up as tall as his boyfriend ever. Mike leaned down slightly, and they met in the middle.

„Love you.“ Will said gently.

„Love you.“ Mike echoed.

Notes for the Chapter:

Can't take too long to finish this. I'd say it's gonna end up 3 chapters, but who knows?

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm really sorry about this whole fic. Don't think I've ever done anything quite so angsty.

They were well fed and too tired to do much more than slowly make their way upstairs almost an hour later. Only half of that hour had been spent actually eating the excellent grilled cheese El and Will‘s mom had produced together. The rest of it had been all silence, holding hands, waiting for something to happen. Because at least Will and Mike had still anticipated the Wheelers calling or coming by to pry Mike away from Will. But the clock had eventually hit 9pm, and while it was a Friday and they would sleep in tomorrow, Will‘s and Mike‘s eyes just wouldn‘t obey any other command but *‚fall shut, go to sleep‘*.

El joined the two of them in Will‘s room for just a moment while they were still sitting on the bed next to each other. There never had been a question as to where Mike was going to sleep, considering that it was normal for them to share the bed since Christmas. At least with Will‘s family it was.

„I think you‘re safe for the night.“ El said. „But you know I‘m next door if anything happens.“

„What do you think could happen?“ Will asked, puzzled. „They‘re not gonna break in.“

„I don‘t know what that was.“ she sighed, clearly frustrated. „This just isn‘t a Demogorgon or Shadow Monster or something. I- I don‘t know how to help!“ To underline this, El stomped her foot on the

floor once.

Will shook his head slowly, eyes blurred. „What if you just... just not think about your powers for once? Just be here, okay?“

„Okay.“ El swallowed hard. She came over to hug Mike tight, press a kiss on his cheek. She did the same with Will before telling the boys goodnight. „I‘ll still be next door.“

„In case anything happens?“ Will asked, chuckling weakly.

„In case you need anything.“ El returned. She was gone then. Mike and Will were alone and ready to slip under the blanket.

It took a bit of shuffling and shifting around to find a comfortable resting position, but once they had finally ended up with their noses almost touching and Will‘s hand feeling for Mike‘s heartbeat, both let out a sigh of contentment. Will‘s limbs were aching just from the stress of the last hours and stretching in his bed was about the best thing that he could do in his current situation.

„What about tomorrow?“ Will could suddenly hear Mike whisper. There was no way to really see his face in the dark, but the fear was audible to him.

„You‘re safe here.“

„No.“ Mike said, unconvinced. „If my parents want to send me away, there‘s nothing you can do. Hopper would even have to help them with that.“

„He wouldn‘t.“ That wasn‘t just what Will hoped. He knew for a fact that Hopper would rather resign from his position as Chief than help them hurting Mike. But maybe resigning wouldn‘t be necessary. „He can hide you. In his cabin, you know. No one knows about it. We could just tell them you ran away a-and I could come by every day after school.“ That very moment, it didn‘t matter to Will how absurd that sounded; ruining Mike‘s entire future by keeping him out of school. But it seemed to help.

„You really think we could pull that off?“ Mike laughed desperately. „Think I could stay there until I turn eighteen?“

„Pff...“ Will snorted. „What‘s three years? It‘s nothing, and then you‘re free.“

„Nothing...“ Mike trailed off. „Wouldn‘t be nothing at a boarding school.“

And that was absolutely true. Will tried to keep his mind in the here and now, and yet it wandered off to a terrible place. A dark dorm with plain gray walls; a cold place. Mike surrounded by strangers, but alone in the dark.

„But that won‘t happen.“ Will snapped himself out of his thoughts. „Not with your mom around. I know she‘s not like your dad.“

„She looked like-“ Mike‘s voice cracked then. „...like I was some mistake, or something disgusting.“ He exhaled as if he was carrying the weight of the world right now. „She wants me gone.“

„Okay...“ Will resigned. „Okay. That‘s not true, but you‘re not gonna believe me, so...“

„So?“

„First thing we do in the morning is call Jonathan and Nancy. How does that sound?“

With the tiniest of nods, Mike inched so close Will couldn‘t possibly keep his hand on his boyfriend‘s sternum anymore. It was okay, though, Mike‘s frantic heartbeat had mostly steadied, and Will found himself mostly satisfied with his nose resting somewhere near his the other boy‘s collarbone.

„Keep your feet still for the next two weeks. I‘m gonna try and handle this from here until then.“

Nancy‘s advice had been as comforting as it had been useless. She supported Mike, naturally, but there was only so much she could do while still in New York with Jonathan. Spring break was only two weeks away, though, and Nancy sure as hell wouldn‘t just sit around doing nothing for fourteen days while her brother‘s future was at stake.

And so it happened that Hopper‘s Blazer pulled into the driveway around noon on Saturday. It had been more than twelve hours since Mike had appeared on the doorstep. More than twelve hours without any life signs from the Wheeler family. Had it been Will‘s choice, this could have gone on for the rest of their lives, or at least until Nancy‘s and Jonathan‘s spring break.

To his surprise and dismay, though, Hopper had a good reason to be home seven hours before the end of his shift. He had promised to pick up some of Mike‘s stuff if possible, that is if Mike‘s parents let him, but no one had thought he‘d be back this early. Or with Karen Wheeler in the passenger‘s seat.

The only relief in this whole situation was, that Hopper came up to the house carrying a gigantic duffel bag. So Mike would stay for some time. Mike‘s mom following Hopper through the front door was still frightening. Maybe she was here to tell Mike his bag for boarding school was already packed. To rub it in by bringing said bag. Either way, her nose wrinkled and her eyes narrowed at the sight of Will hand in hand with her son.

„Mom?“ Mike croaked, keeping his distance.

„Can we talk alone?“ she asked softly, but with an undertone that Will could only call *cold*. „If that‘s okay with you, Joyce.“

„Can‘t keep you from talking to your son.“ Will‘s mom returned, bile hardly concealed. „You can use the living room.“

„Be there in a second, mom.“ Mike uttered towards the floor. Nodding, she slowly walked towards the kitchen from where she was going to reach the living room.

The entire family plus Mike remained in the entrance for a short while, everyone doing something to encourage him. Be it Hopper, who roughly patted his shoulder and told them he had to go back to work, El, who kissed his cheek, Joyce, who embraced him like his mother should have just a few seconds ago, or Will, who tugged his head underneath Mike‘s chin the way he did when he needed safety. Because he knew Mike needed to provide safety to feel whole.

While Will really wanted to grant them their privacy, he and El ended up hidden by the entrance to the living room, listening as Mike approached his mother. „Mom...“ he said again.

„Your- your father needs time to think.“ Karen Wheeler started on a topic that was less than ideal. „He needs some time alone.“ El‘s and Will‘s widened eyes locked. Mrs. Wheeler‘s words sounded final, there was no doubt about it.

„S-so he‘s gone?“ Mike‘s voice came out lost and weak.

„It‘s not your fault, Michael.“ Mrs. Wheeler sighed. „And I shouldn‘t... I shouldn‘t have let this happen.“

„Right.“

„Are you okay?“

„N-no.“ Despite the gravity of this one word, Will smiled to himself a bit. No, Mike wouldn‘t just shrug everything off and go back home just because Mrs. Wheeler apparently kicked his father out. He was stronger than that.

„I still love you. Nothing‘s going to change that, Mike.“ Mrs. Wheeler went on, sounding at least honest. „And I really want you to come home.“

„Did Nancy call you?“

„Of course she did. She‘s known about this for a few months, hm?“

„Yeah.“ Mike confirmed. Will remembers the day they had told her. It had taken a fair bit of convincing, but eventually Mike had learned that coming out to someone you trust is among the best feelings in the world.

„Well, this isn‘t about your sister. I would have come here no matter what.“ Mike‘s mom took a deep breath. „Just take some time. Whatever your father said, I promise it‘s not going to happen. Come home.“

That very moment, Will and El silently fell into each other arms. At least this whole boarding school nonsense was out of the way. Mike would stay in Hawkins. Their first victory in this matter.

„Mom, I don‘t know...“ Mike mumbled so quietly, Will could hardly hear him. „It‘s just so... I don‘t know. It‘s hard.“

„And that‘s okay.“ Mrs. Wheeler assured. „I packed a few things for you. I just wanted you to know I‘m gonna help you when you‘re ready.“

„Help me with what?“

A short silence followed. It radiated a sense of confusion. „Help you get better, of course.“ Karen Wheeler said as if that was common sense. „Look, I‘ve called this therapist in Indianapolis this morning, and he‘d be more than happy to take your case. Doctor Morris helps confused kids, and I think-“

A few things happened at once. Mike came running into the kitchen in a matter of seconds, pushing past Will and El who both had to fight themselves and each other. While Will was busy swallowing down his bile, he also needed to keep a firm grip on El to stop her from storming into the living room. It would have been a stupid move, but to his luck she didn‘t use her powers to break free, instead allowing Will to eventually drag her in the direction Mike went.

They didn‘t find him anywhere near, though, as he had already ran

upstairs. Will‘s mom, who appeared to have waited right there by the stairs, briskly made her way to the living room. „Karen, what was that?“ they could hear her shout, making it hard to decide whether or not to follow Mike, or listen to the two mothers.

Will found himself frozen in place once Karen Wheeler started speaking again. „Joyce, do you really think we should tolerate this? Look, I found this therapist in Indianapolis. He could help Will too, if you-“

„Get out of my house, Karen.“ Will had never heard his mother hiss like that, low and threatening, sounding about ready to claw Mrs. Wheeler‘s face off. „Get out!“

„I see. I never thought you were *that* kind of mother.“ Karen Wheeler said calmly. „Joyce, I really want to give Mike some time to make up his mind about this. Or to come to terms with his illness. But he‘ll be home by next Friday, because we‘ll have our first appointment with Doctor Morris that afternoon.“

„Looks like I can‘t do anything about it.“ Will‘s mom said, guiding Mrs. Wheeler back to the front door.

Coming out of the kitchen, Mike‘s mom looked at Will only once. „I‘m sorry.“ she apologized, but Will was sure she didn‘t mean *‚I‘m sorry I disturbed you‘*. Her face seemed to basically scream *‚I‘m sorry you‘re left with such a terrible mother who would let you suffer like that‘*.

Will had sat with her at the dinner table so many times during his childhood. He had spent the best nights of his life in her basement,

with her homemade lemonade and snacks, but that very moment, he hated Mrs. Wheeler.

His mom only somewhat relaxed once Mrs. Wheeler was gone and door was shut, and even then some tension remained. „*That kind of mother!*“ she spat. „This isn‘t the end of it. At least she had the guts to-“ Joyce trailed off, looking at her son and adopted daughter. „You two better go upstairs and help Mike. I‘ll make a few calls.“

They both nodded in unison before heading up the stairs. Neither of them asked who exactly their mom was going to call. Will figured Jonathan and Nancy, because during their earlier call this morning they had promised to stay at home and wait for further information. For a second Will even contemplated getting the entire party involved, but in all honesty he didn‘t want too many people around right now, and Mike probably wouldn‘t have appreciated that either.

They didn‘t find him in Will‘s room. Mike wasn‘t in El‘s room either. The same went for Joyce‘s and Hopper‘s bedroom. It was only then that they realized the bathroom door was locked, with faint squeaking noises slipping past the wooden door.

„Mike!“ Will said loud enough to be sure his boyfriend heard him. „Open the door!“ It wasn‘t a request; Will was legitimately scared for Mike‘s life that very moment.

„C-can‘t!“ came the weak, labored response. „Can‘t!“

„Mike, I‘m gonna open the door.“ El told him carefully. „Is that okay?“

„O-okay.“

The lock clicked once, and Will took that as a sign to slowly push the door open, because he couldn‘t see if Mike was within its way. However, they found the black-haired boy hugging his own knees on the floor right in front of the bathtub. It was even worse than the night before from what Will could tell. There was a stench lingering in the room that could only mean Mike had thrown up, assaulting Will‘s nostrils despite Mike already having flushed the toilet. The window slid open on it‘s own.

„I got you.“ Will whispered, sliding the last few inches towards his boyfriend on his knees. „Mike, I‘m here, okay?“

El looked increasingly worried when Mike hardly responded, even when Will‘s hands came up to cup his cheeks. „I‘m getting Joyce.“

„Wait!“ Will pleaded. „We‘re gonna handle this!“ They *were* going to handle it, because Will had experience with situations like these, only they had been inverted in the past. What he knew, though, was that more people tended to make it worse.

With Will‘s help, Mike came down slowly, but steadily. Will knew El had watched the whole thing suspiciously from the start, always ready to run downstairs and get their mom involved if necessary. She never got involved though, because Will signed her to keep at a distance more than once. One voice. One person. That was all Mike needed. All he could probably handle. His brain couldn‘t have made sense of too many impressions at once in his current state. And so Will went from just kneeling by Mike‘s side to talking softly and whispering nothings, to touching gently and asking where exactly Mike had felt his touch. It was all about bringing the other boy back to reality.

„Hurts...“ was the first thing Mike pressed out after some ten minutes.

„Yeah.“ Will agreed quietly. „I know.“ He really did know. Just thinking about losing his mother‘s unconditional support made him physically sick, about ready to follow Mike‘s example and throw up. As easy as it was for Will to hate Mrs. Wheeler for what she said, he also knew Mike could never just brush it off and hate his own mother. That just made everything so much worse.

„Nah.“ Mike shook his head with a lopsided, dishonest and pained smile. „Not that.“ He slowly raised his hand to show Will his bloody knuckles. „Floor‘s hard.“ Will only now noticed the small blood stains on the white tiles right next to where Mike was sitting.

He turned to El, who was still lingering by the door. „Guess you should really get mom now.“

Notes for the Chapter:

But it's going to get better, I promise!

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

> Last chapter! Yay! A few days later than I intended, but I really had a hard time writing this. Like, at least 12-hours-of-staring-at-the-blank-screen hard.

The weekend went. So did day after day of the next week of school. Mike didn‘t go home once, instead waking up with Will in the morning, going to sleep with him at night, eating and watching TV with the family; living with them. These days were tinged in fear and anticipation, though, and while Will would have loved nothing more than to be able to send Mike back to a functioning and supportive home, he also enjoyed this brief glimpse of what their future could look like. What it would feel like to have their own home, to wake up to the sight of each other every morning.

Of course, the rest of the party found out in time. This really wasn‘t something Will and Mike could keep from them for any period of time, but their support was needed anyways. Will wanted Mike to understand just how many people he actually had in his life. More than just his mother and father. Shallow comfort. Better than nothing.

Thursday came as a surprise then. School had been one of the most dreadful experiences for both Mike and Will that day, because they knew Mrs. Wheeler would come and drag Mike to this so called therapist on Friday. They believed that until her call that afternoon, when Karen Wheeler announced to Will‘s mom that she had postponed their appointment by two weeks. That had been Nancy‘s doing, obviously. She and Jonathan would be home by then.

And like that another weekend came and went, all without Mrs.

Wheeler showing up even once. Mike suffered from this more than he admitted, and there was nothing Will could do but be there. They didn‘t talk about it, but they both knew it was getting worse. Will felt it in the way Mike curled more into himself at night. He worried about his boyfriend‘s slightly unsteady heartbeat when they lay in bed with Mike‘s back pressed against his front, palm carefully feeling for Mike‘s sternum. One minute he‘d be calm, the next he‘d writhe and whimper in his sleep, heart racing.

Mike basically walked the school corridors like a zombie these days. He didn‘t speak in class, he didn‘t speak during lunch. Their lives were reduced to getting through the days and whispering in the dead of night or the early morning hours, when they woke after maybe three hours of sleep, with another three hours left until Will‘s alarm clock was set to go off. Even with Mike present at the Byers/Hopper house for close to two weeks, a sense of normality just would not establish.

All Will really could hope for was spring break.

His leg twitching nervously, Will clutched his fingers into Mike‘s shirt, and vice versa. A squeaking noise slipped past the front door, exactly the noise Jonathan‘s old Ford made whenever it came to a stop. He‘d never had the money to get the brakes fixed. Both boys were on their feet and by the door before it swung open.

Will would probably never be able to describe just how grateful he felt for Mike‘s older sister. Finally, two weeks into this horrible ordeal, Mike had at least a part of his family back. Wordlessly he let Nancy pull him into a long embrace, while Jonathan went over to briefly hug Will, El, their mother and Hopper, in that order.

„What took you so long?“ Their mom sniffed a bit when she embraced her older son a second time.

„Roads were stuffed.“ Jonathan shrugged. „We were stuck somewhere near Pittsburgh all night.“

„I‘d rather see you stuck in a traffic jam than speeding.“ Hopper grunted with a pat to Jonathan‘s shoulder. „Good to see you.“

„Hey…“ Jonathan started carefully. „Is it okay for Nancy to stay with us? It‘s just the circumstances, you know.“

Both adults‘ eyebrows arched a bit at those words, but everyone in the room instantly understood. Nancy, having finally broken up the embrace with Mike, approached them, a few small tears glistering in her eyes. „I told my mom I‘m not gonna stay with her until we‘ve got this all figured out.“

„The bed in the guestroom is small.“ Joyce pondered. „But if you can make it work, you‘re welcome, honey.“ Will thought this would probably have been a different story had Nancy and Jonathan still been in high school, but seeing as they shared an apartment, there was no reason to force them apart for the night. Another round of hugs was exchanged, and Will watched almost contentedly with Mike

pressed against his side.

They used the opportunity to exchange a few small pecks that they both needed. It really wasn‘t like they couldn‘t have kissed in front of everyone, but shyness was still a factor in this, so they usually waited for the right moment and then made the best of it. If there was anything Mike still enjoyed, it was this, and Will was more than happy to help with that.

„She‘s the best, isn‘t she?“ he whispered.

„Yeah...“ Mike pressed out hoarsely. He didn‘t try hiding how upset he actually was, but to Will that was way better than his dull eyes of the last weeks. At least now some of the life was back. Will felt himself tear up as well, but right here, with all the people he loved in one room, he allowed himself that.

Will had gotten to know Nancy as someone who didn‘t procrastinate. So it was no surprise that she wanted to talk everything through with Mike immediately. Will had really thought she‘d want some time a lone with her brother, but Nancy insisted on both boys joining her in Will‘s bedroom, while Will‘s family got settled in with Jonathan downstairs.

„She‘s not taken you to that so-called therapist, right?“ Nancy began.

„No.“ Mike uttered, leaning on to Will as if he couldn‘t support his own weight anymore.

Through the mess of black hair in his face, Will could see her small but triumphant smile. „Good. But I guess she still thinks she can pull this off.“

Because Mike kept his face hidden behind Will‘s neck, hot breath causing goosebumps, Will asked after a moment of silence „Then what do we do?“

„We can‘t keep you and mom away from each other forever.“ Nancy sighed. „I told her I‘m not coming home before we‘ve worked this out, but you have to go home eventually, Mike.“

„I know.“ Mike‘s voice wavered, dangerously close to breaking. „I- I really miss her.“

There it was. Everything Will had been able to think about for two weeks, packed in three painful words. How was Mikesupposed *not* to miss his mother? And how was he supposed not to crave her approval? He craved it the same way Will had craved his father‘s approval. Only, he had never been able to become the son Lonnie had wanted him to be. Was all this even still fixable?

„That‘s her fault.“ Nancy scoffed. She slowly reached over to take Mike‘s hand in hers. „What happened?“ she asked, tracing the remains of his self-inflicted injury. After he had punched the bathroom floor, Mike had spent the better part of the last two weeks with his right hand in bandages.

„It‘s okay.“ he sniffed. „Doesn‘t hurt anymore.“

At Nancy‘s suspicious glance, Will silently shook his head to tell her she shouldn‘t ask. Mike wouldn‘t appreciate being reminded of what had clearly been a panic attack. There was a long silence after that, and Mike did nothing more but bury his face somewhere between Will‘s collar and his jawline.

„You know...“ Nancy started again after a while. „I talked mom into coming over tomorrow. At least she wants to listen. That‘s... that‘s not too bad, is it? Just show her you‘re happy. If anything else matters to her, she‘s a lost cause.“

„But what is she gonna do, I mean-“

„I‘ll be there the whole time. I‘ll make sure she doesn‘t just drag you out of here.“ Nancy sounded solemn. „Look, I really think these last two weeks have changed things. I mean, you haven‘t talked to her, Mike. She sounded so desperate on the phone. Like she‘s about ready to do anything to get you back.“

Mike nodded slowly, as if he really couldn‘t believe his sister‘s words. Nancy smiled, though. „I‘m going downstairs. You two wanna join us?“

Will knew the answer without a word from Mike. „Later.“ he gently said. Will and Mike sunk a bit further into the sheets together.

„Could you be any more cute?“ Nancy playfully scoffed. She poorly feigned disgust but eventually leaned down to press a quick kiss on

each of their cheeks.

The nervous edge Mike had been on for so long finally started to dissolve when Nancy had left for the living room. Completely out of the blue, he burst out in laughter. „She called us cute! Can‘t- can‘t believe this is my sister!“

„I told you before, you‘re cute.“ Will giggled. „One reason why I love you so much. Are you cold?“ Mike shivered just slightly in his embrace. Will did too, but that really didn‘t mean anything. He was almost always cold.

„Just a bit. ‘m tired.“ Mike sighed. Well, it had been a sleepless night. At least now they had *some* relief from their worries. Mike yawned when Will draped the blanket over them both, turning them into a tangle of limbs and soft cuddles.

„Scared?“

„A bit.“ Mike admitted. „But we got another night before...“

Before what? Will thought. He could do nothing but hold Mike close and hope for the best. That, and press their lips together time and time again to remind Mike they were absolutely going to stay together.

Will had at least something that resembled a plan. Maybe it was good that Mrs. Wheeler arrived early that Saturday. Mike was still in the shower when Will‘s mom led her inside, with Will anxiously pacing the living room. He could hear talking, complete with some venom, from his mom and Karen Wheeler, although the latter sounded apologetic.

„So you‘re gonna show her?“ Jonathan asked.

„What else am I gonna do?“ Will shrugged, shooting a gaze at the thick leather book on the living room table. „And you? You‘re gonna stay?“

„I don‘t think so.“ His older brother bit his lip before going on. „I don‘t want this to look like a court. Me and El we‘re just gonna run some errands I guess.“

„Might as well be a court. She‘d deserve that. Ugh, I guess you‘re right.“

Nancy was going to stay, and that should be enough. From what had happened in the past two weeks, it seemed a bit like she had at least a minimum of influence on her mother‘s decisions and Will couldn‘t have been happier to have her with him. Jonathan retreated just in time for Joyce to lead Karen Wheeler into the living room. Her eyes looked more than a bit red, which got Will‘s hopes up immediately.

„I‘m gonna make coffee.“ his mom said curtly, rushing off. Will had rarely ever seen her in such an unforgiving state of mind, and he really wished Hopper didn‘t have to work this morning. He could have calmed her. Maybe coffee was a bad idea.

„Mom, hi.“ Nancy greeted, not as warm as Karen would have probably hoped for. They still hugged briefly; after all, it was the first time in months they saw each other. „You wanna sit down?“

Mrs. Wheeler nodded. She sat down on the far side of the couch from where Will was sitting. „Will...“ she nodded once.

„Mrs. Wheeler.“ Will uttered. „Mike‘s in the shower.“

„I know, I‘m... I‘m early.“

„Yeah.“

Silence settled over the living room, with the only audible noise being the water kettle going in the kitchen - the low thrumming of boiling hot liquid. The scent of coffee came floating over to them in two minutes time.

„I-“ Will started, coughing awkwardly. At least what he saw in Mrs. Wheeler‘s eyes wasn‘t contempt. Not even pity. Regret would have described it better, so Will could eventually collect himself. „I wanted

to show you something.“

„You did?“ Karen Wheeler‘s eyes fell on the book Will had brought from his room. He usually kept it in his bedside top drawer. For bad nights.

He took it in both hands, fidgeting with the cover for a bit. „I got it from my brother.“ Upon seeing Nancy smile, Will finally found the strength to inch closer to Mrs. Wheeler to hand it over.

She carefully opened the photo album and almost immediately took in a shuddering breath. Just like every time Will looked at these photos, his heart made a small leap.

Jonathan had started this whole thing just hours after Will and Mike had made that single most important step of their lives so far, back in December. The moment they had realized they could finally be themselves around Will‘s home, the two of them had acted accordingly.

So the first photo showed the living room at their old house. The torn up couch with Will and Mike together, wrapped around each other in a light doze under the Christmas quilt that would fit any ugly sweater party. „That was when we told my family about us.“ Will mumbled.

„Oh...“ was all Mrs. Wheeler breathed out.

„Yeah. W-we had a great Christmas.“ Will switched pages to show

more photos from that holiday, with him and Mike baking cookies, them in a circle on the living room floor with the rest of the party, all laughs and smiles. One thing all those photos had in common was, they were happy. Just *so* happy.

Will hesitated before turning pages once again, because he knew the book inside out. Karen Wheeler didn‘t show the smallest sign of disgust, though, so Will pulled through with it. The three photos had been taken in quick succession without Mike and Will even knowing.They had only found out after Jonathan had gotten the film developed.

Number one had Mike and Will facing each other under what was clearly a mistletoe. Number two showed them with their lips pressed together, eyes closed. In the third one they were locked in an embrace that looked just as soft and perfect as Will remembered it. The tingling sensation of Mike‘s Christmas sweater on his cheek. Will couldn‘t have cared less if this whole album was cheesy. Because it was so perfect.

There wasn‘t a lot in it yet, given that Will and Mike had only made their relationship known to Jonathan and Joyce about five months ago, but he was sure they were going to expand on it.

When no one else said a word, Nancy drew a long breath. „See what you‘re missing out on, mom? That's Mike's life, and you have no idea.“

Will studied Mrs. Wheeler. She had a hand pressed flat over her mouth. „I- I mean-“

„He can do without dad, but if you don‘t support him-“ Nancy trailed off. „Mom, I swear to god if you don‘t stop this nonsense, that‘s the last you‘ve seen of me.“

„It‘s just that-“

Will would have let Mrs. Wheeler finish, but Nancy didn‘t want to have it. „What, mom?“ she demanded. „You don‘t want him to be happy? God, he‘s fifteen. Do you even remember what that‘s like? Mike needs you more than ever right now, and what do you do?“

By now Will really thought Nancy was overdoing it a bit. A ton of accusations wouldn‘t help here, but before he got to stop her, she shut up on her own. Will hadn‘t even noticed the shower upstairs stopping, but there he was; Mike, clad in a plain shirt and sweatpants, hair still slightly wet. Mrs. Wheeler stared. Nancy did too.

„Mom.“ he sighed, his small, terrified voice leaving Will frozen on the couch.

„Would you- would you sit down with me, Michael?“ Karen Wheeler still had her hand covering her mouth insistently, as if trying to keep something inside. Mike approached the couch, which Will took as a signal to scoot away from her again. The photo album remained open in her lap and there was no doubt Mike‘s eyes landed on it when he flopped down and propped his elbows on his knees.

„How are you, sweetie.“ Mrs. Wheeler asked, voice hushed and cracking.

Mike shrugged wordlessly.

„I‘m- I‘m so sorry. Do you believe me?“

Mike nodded, again without really responding. Mrs. Wheeler‘s relief was palpable when she carefully let her hand rest on her son‘s shoulder. He didn‘t shrug her off. Will couldn‘t really help right now, as much as he wanted. He had done what he could and at least it looked like Mike‘s mom was ready to make amends.

„Your father said he won‘t come back before we‘ve... fixed you, as he put it.“ she went on, almost in tears now. „So... so there‘s that.“

„What‘s that supposed to mean?“ Nancy asked sharply.

„It means I‘m signing the divorce papers next week. I just thought I could- I was scared.“ The breakdown came without an actual warning. Will had to turn his head away in shame. He wasn‘t really used to adults crying so the whole thing felt a bit like he was invading a very private moment that was only meant for the Wheeler family. „It‘s not your fault.“ A painful sob tore from her. „A-and nothing‘s wrong with you.“

„I know.“ Mike said. „I know that, mom.“

Will turned back to them just in time to see her grasp Mike in an

embrace that he didn‘t quite reciprocate. „Come home, please! Michael, I can‘t stand this! I know I can‘t get things to be the way they used to be, and I know it‘s gonna take time, but I‘m swear, I‘ll do everything I can to-“

„Mom... I don‘t know...“

Will sighed to himself. No, it couldn‘t be that easy. Something was definitely broken between Mike and his mom, but at least Mrs. Wheeler realized that and backpedaled a bit. „Okay.“ she sniffed, trying to calm herself. „Let‘s not rush too far ahead. You know I‘d never force you to do something you don‘t want to. Take your time if that‘s okay with, with...“

She shot Will a questioning gaze, but that very moment his mom appeared in the door with a steaming can and a staple of cups occupying both her hands. She answered for Will. „It‘s okay with us, Karen.“

„And it‘s... it‘s okay if I come by? You know, to talk.“

„I‘d make that a condition.“ Will‘s mom set everything down on the table. „Every day. Mike?“

„Yeah.“ he nodded. „That‘s okay.“

During the silence that followed no one even touched the coffee or the cups, until Will‘s mom clapped her hands in an attempt to chase

away the heavy tension in the room. „So, does anyone want milk and sugar?“

That was like the signal they all needed to break out of their thoughts. Mike reached for the cups first. „You drink coffee?“ his mother blurted out immediately.

„Something else you don‘t know about me...“ he mumbled, filling his cup. But Mike smiled a bit too and actually leaned against her shoulder. Will pressed his hand, which caused Mike to look at him with a grateful expression that pulled his heartstrings.

It‘s a start. Will thought to himself, and really, that was all they could ask for right now. It would be hard, more tears would follow. It would take time to rebuild trust, because that was one of those things that are easier lost than gained. The Wheelers would have to sort so many things out. A divorce. Their living accommodations. But the way Karen reached up to stroke across Mike‘s still wet hair, their combined tears and quiet sobs, all that made Will confident they could make it work.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Let me know if you like it. Because I don't know if I do, to be honest. It kinda feels trivial and rushed at the same time. Meh.